

# RCA Consumer e-News

June 2017

## Highlights

Emergency Preparedness • Truth-in-Billing Rules • Energy Savings Tips • Digging with CARE  
Outreach Events • Economic Regulation of Public Utilities • Western Conference of Public Service Commissioners

### Emergency Preparedness

*Essential utilities can be disrupted in the event of a natural disaster. Are you prepared?*

Natural disasters such as an earthquake, volcano eruption, fire, severe weather, avalanche, or flood, and a gas or power plant explosion may disrupt essential public utility services.

The RCA recommends reviewing the list below and taking the necessary steps to prepare for such an event.

- ✓ Build and maintain an [Emergency Kit](#) that includes important items like non-perishable food, water, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra flashlights, and batteries.
- ✓ Make a [Family Communication Plan](#). The communication plan should address aid for someone with disability, care of children, seniors, and pets. Include emergency contacts for work, daycare, and school.
- ✓ Secure copies of important documents such as insurance cards, immunization records, and paperwork about any serious or on-going medical condition.
- ✓ Secure alternative charging methods for your phone or any device that requires power. For more information, see [Get Tech Ready](#).



1964 Alaska Earthquake

- ✓ Consider purchasing surge protectors for appliances and other equipment.
- ✓ If you are considering purchasing a generator for your home, consult a qualified electrician or engineer before purchasing and installing.

For more information, visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov).

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## Telecom Corner: Truth-in-Billing Rules

Confused about your phone bill? Here is some information to help you better understand your phone bill and know what you can do to address a billing issue.

The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) [Truth-in-Billing Rules](#) require telecommunications service providers to provide clear, factual, plain language descriptions of services for which consumers are being billed. The service providers must also inform their customers of any blocking options offered for third-party billing, place third-party charges in a distinct section of the bill, and include a separate subtotal for the third-party charges in the distinct bill section and on the payment page. For more information, see: [FCC Truth-in-Billing Rules](#).

Similarly, the RCA has rules for service providers in Alaska when it comes to disclosing charges, taxes, fees, and terms of service to customers. Additionally, service providers designated as eligible telecommunications carrier must comply with the CTIA's *Consumer Code for Wireless Service*. Those rules can be found in: [3 AAC 52.230](#), *Subscriber Billing*, and in [3 AAC 53.450](#), *Consumer Protection and Service Quality*.

If the charges on your bill for your cable, internet, wireless, or interstate long-distance services are incorrect, contact your service provider. If you are not satisfied with the response, you can file a complaint with the FCC by visiting [www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov) or by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC.

If the billing dispute relates to your local landline, intrastate long distance service, or cellular service under the Lifeline & Link Up program, you may file a complaint with the RCA Consumer Protection & Information Section, but you must first attempt to resolve the complaint with your service provider.

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## Energy Savings



### Did you know?

You can *save* up to \$1,347 a year if you make energy improvements in your home? Check out this video on Home Energy Assessment, then get your own energy assessment.

<http://www.akenergyefficiency.org/get-an-assessment/>

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## Digging with CARE

Are you planning a home improvement, gardening, or landscaping project in between fishing trips?

The RCA Consumer Protection & Information Section would like Alaskans to remember the importance of digging with C.A.R.E.



- C**all 8-1-1 before you dig
- A**llow required time for marking
- R**espect and protect the marks
- E**xcavate carefully

## Outreach Events

*The Consumer Protection & Information Section is making a difference in the lives of Alaskans by protecting, mediating, intervening, and empowering ratepayers and homebuyers.*

Home Choice Seminar  
Alaska Housing Finance Corporation  
April 12, 2017, Fairbanks



Greater-Fairbanks Board of Realtors Meeting



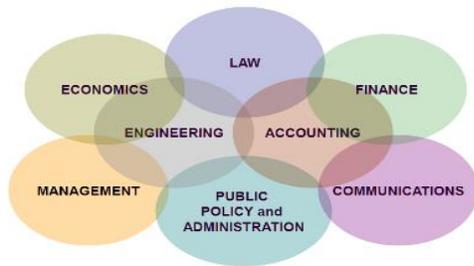
RCA on Utility Bill Scam  
AARP Fraud & Identity Theft Forum  
April 25, 2017, Palmer



RCA Booth at the Anchorage Home Show  
April 14, 15, & 16

Staff met with hundreds of customers to answer questions about public utility issues and promote the *Call Before You Dig* program, energy efficiency, and information on utility service connections.

## Economic Regulation of Public Utilities



Annually, the RCA receives hundreds of pages of data, much of which requires RCA review, careful analysis, and decision-making. *So what happens when a regulated utility wants to change the base rate it charges its customers?*

### ☉ Tariff Advice Filing

Regulated utilities wishing to change base rates must file a tariff advice (TA) to the RCA. Such a filing typically includes a “Revenue Requirement” which is the amount necessary for the utility to cover its costs to provide safe, reliable services to customers, along with earning a fair “return” on the utility’s investment.

The tariff review process established by [AS 42.05.361](#) et seq., includes a public comment period and allows the RCA to approve, reject, or suspend a tariff filing. Comments may be submitted on the RCA website located at the top right of the webpage entitled [View Public Notices & Submit Comments](#).

### ☉ Rate Cases

If the RCA suspends the TA into a docket, the RCA functions like a court. A panel of at least three commissioners and an administrative law judge are assigned to consider testimony from experts and party witnesses, and issue a final decision.

## Economic Regulation of Public Utilities con’t.

A rate case could take up to 450 days (about 15 months). *Why so long?* There’s a lot at stake and it is important that the participants provide comments and evidence so that when the Commission makes a decision regarding the utility’s request, it makes a fair and balanced decision that is based upon facts and evidence that has been presented by the parties and thoroughly reviewed by the Commission.

For example, on June 1, 2016, ENSTAR Natural Gas Company, a division of SEMCO Energy, Inc., filed [TA285-4](#) which included a revenue requirement study, rate design, and cost-of-service study based on a 2015 test year. The RCA issued a [public notice](#) and received six comments. The tariff filing was suspended into [Docket U-16-066](#), so that the Commission could consider the request, comments, and evidence presented by ENSTAR as well as parties such as the Attorney General and those that were granted permission to intervene: Chugach Electric Association, Inc.; Matanuska Electric Association, Inc.; Homer Electric Association, Inc.; Titan Alaska LNG, LLC; and JL Properties, Inc.

The panel of five commissioners and an administrative law judge presided over a three-week public hearing that began June 5, 2017. The Commission will make a final decision on or before September 22, 2017.



Docket U-16-066, Public Hearing, June 5, 2017

For more information about this rate case, visit the RCA website at [www.rca.alaska.gov](http://www.rca.alaska.gov) and type in Docket U-16-066 in the “Find a Matter” search box.

## *Annual Meeting of the Western Conference of Public Service Commissioners*

Nearly 300 people attended the Western Conference of Public Service Commissioners on May 21 - 24, 2017, in downtown Anchorage, Alaska. President Stephen McAlpine, current president of the Western Conference, presided over the meeting.



Governor Bill Walker, Commissioner Stephen McAlpine (seated)

Governor Bill Walker provided opening remarks on May 22, followed by Patrick McCormick, Special Counsel to the United States Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Patrick McCormick discussed the upcoming FERC Commissioner confirmation hearing, and recent Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearings on cybersecurity, microgrids, electromagnetic pulse, and geo-magnetic disturbance issues. He also spoke about the current political realities of PURPA reform.

Conference sessions included a range of panels covering telecommunications trends, cyber security, natural gas and pipeline safety, and clean energy.

President McAlpine thanks the RCA staff, sponsors, and all that assisted for supporting a successful conference.

For additional information on conference sessions, please visit <http://western.naruc.org/Meetings/>.

### *Cyber Security Panel*



*Standing:* Chairman Bob Pickett, Regulatory Commission of Alaska

*Seated:* Phil Jones, former Commissioner, Washington Utilities & Transportation Commission, Phil Jones Consulting LLC

Clay Storey, Senior Security Manager, Avista

Harold T. Hoang, Colonel, United States Air Force, Director J6, Cyber Operations/C4 Systems, Alaskan NORAD Region and Alaskan Command

Joseph McClelland, Director, Office of Energy Infrastructure Security, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

### *Telecommunications Trends*



*(L-R):* Commissioner Rebecca L. Pauli, Regulatory Commission of Alaska; Shawn Uschmann, Director of External Affairs, AT&T; Benjamin Aron, Director, State Regulatory and External Affairs, CTIA; Sherry Lichtenberg, Ph.D., Telecommunications, National Regulatory Research Institute; Commissioner Paul Kjellander, President, Idaho Public Utilities Commission; Mark Reynolds, Northwest Region Vice President, Public Policy, CenturyLink

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